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ABSTRACT

An identification procedure was implemented in the Greensboro Public Schools (North Carolina) to address the issue of the underrepresentation of minority students in the Academically Gifted Program. Although approximately 50% of the Greensboro Public School elementary students were minority students, only 13% of the students in the elementary gifted program were minority students. A special project was developed to target minority students, and the number of minority students in the elementary gifted program increased by 140% in 2 years, without making modifications in the state-mandated criteria for academically gifted classification. These results were achieved through systematic review of group test scores, close monitoring to be sure all minority students progressed through the entire evaluation sequence, the knowledgeable participation of parents, and the assignment of two diagnostician/coordinators to the project. (Author/JDD)

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Increasing Minority Participation in the Greensboro Academically Gifted Program Without Changing Entrance Criteria

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Abstract: An identification procedure has been implemented in the Greensboro Public Schools to address the issue of the underrepresentation of minority students in the Academically Gifted (AG) Program. Through systematic review of group test scores and close monitoring to be sure all minority students progress through the entire evaluation sequence, the number of minority students in the elementary AG Program has increased by 140% in two years. No modifications were made in the state-mandated criteria for AG classification.

BACKGROUND

Underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs: Across the United States the awareness is growing that minority students are significantly underrepresented in gifted programs. This problem was brought to the forefront in Greensboro during the 1985-86 school year when concerns were expressed to the local Board of Education. Although approximately 50% of Greensboro Public School (GPS) elementary students were minority students, only 13% of the students in the elementary gifted program were minority students. Therefore, a Task Force was established during the spring of 1986 to study the issue and make recommendations.

Task Force findings and recommendations: The Task Force members did extensive research investigating the identification procedures of ten other states, reviewing articles on gifted minority students, and studying a document developed by the Mid-Atlantic Center for Race Equity related to increasing the participation of minority students in gifted programs. It was concluded that the issue of the underrepresentation of minority students in the GPS Academically Gifted (AG) Program was complex but that there were at least four hypothetized causes: (1) the somewhat narrow definition of giftedness adopted by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, (2) teachers' lack of awareness of behavioral characteristics of gifted minority students preventing referrals for possible AG classification, (3) the use of possibly biased assessment procedures, and (4) the likelihood that minority parents, as a group, may have less specific information about referral and evaluation procedures than non-minority parents, resulting in minority students discontinuing the evaluation sequence earlier than non-minority students.

The Task Force recommended two immediate objectives. The first objective was to implement a referral procedure that would maximize the opportunity for all potentially gifted minority students to enter the pool of students being evaluated for possible AG classification. The second objective was to implement an evaluation procedure for AG classification that would minimize possible biases against minority students. On the basis of these recommendations, a plan of action was developed, founding the Special AG Project.

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PLAN OF ACTION - The Special AG Project

The Special AG Project (SAGP) was begun on December 1, 1986 as a component of the AG Program specifically designed to implement the objectives set forth by the Task Force. Two educational diagnosticians, Virginia Achey and Sadie Bryant Woods, were appointed to do individual evaluations and coordinate the SAGP. It was decided that the group of students participating initially would include only second through fifth graders. Currently the SAGP still concentrates on second through fifth graders, but plans are being made to expand into the middle schools and eventually the high schools.

Referral to the SAGP Target Group: Each school year, a Target Group (students to be evaluated) is identified by means of a systematic review of students scores from regular state-mandated and local systemwide group testing. In Greensboro, all students in the elementary grades above kindergarten take the California Achievement Test annually* and third graders take the Test of Cognitive Skills. All minority students who score at or above the 85th percentile in a designated number of areas become part of the initial Target Group. Meetings are held for parents at each school in order to explain the SAGP and the importance of identifying gifted students. Questions and concerns are answered, and permission-to-evaluate forms are signed. The final Target Group consists of those systematically referred students whose parents want them included. A few minority students not in the Target Group have also been referred to the SAGP by parents and teachers. There have been between 212 and 270 students in the Target Group each year, and the number continues to increase annually.

Evaluation and AG classification: Students in North Carolina are classified AG on the basis of AG points determined by (1) aptitude and achievement test percentile scores and (2) report card grades (Figure 1). All students in Greensboro who are referred for possible AG classification are entitled to a sequence of three sets of aptitude and achievement screenings or evaluations during a three-year period (two group screenings and one individual evaluation). Those who do not meet state criteria on their first set of group screenings may receive a second set. If they still do not meet the criteria for classification, they may receive an individual evaluation. For SAGP Target Group students, the entire sequence of tests is administered automatically, if needed, whereas parents or school-based committees of students referred through traditional procedures must request the second and third sets of tests in the sequence.

* In 1988-89, first and second graders will not all be routinely tested because of state regulations. An alternative referral process will have to be developed for these students.

Figure 1

North Carolina AG Classification Criteria

Aptitude Test Percentile Scores
+
Achievement Test Percentile Scores
+
Report Card Grades

The Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC), a nationally normed and recognized test approved by North Carolina for use in the schools, has been the test used for the SAGP Target Group students, since early studies suggested it was less culturally biased than more traditional aptitude tests such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) or the Stanford-Binet. Because the SAGP wanted to use the most effective test for identifying gifted minority students and obtain more data on the possible cultural bias of the WISC-R, a comparative study was conducted. Both the K-ABC and the WISC-R were administered to 83 Target Group students (the K-ABC by the educational diagnosticians, the WISC-R by a school psychologist). Students typically scored higher on the WISC-R than on the aptitude section of the K-ABC, and when they did, the WISC-R was used for placement. Minority students referred for possible AG classification based on high achievement were found to be more likely to qualify when WISC-R scores were used than when K-ABC aptitude scores were used. Plans are underway to use the WISC-R instead of the K-ABC for SAGP aptitude testing in the future.

It is important to stress that no modifications have been made in state-mandated criteria for AG classification for SAGP Target Group students. All students must have the same number of "AG Points"--based on the same combination of test percentile scores and classroom grades--as other students classified AG in North Carolina Schools.

The educational diagnosticians: The role of the two educational diagnosticians is a crucial part of the project. In their coordinative role, they establish the Target Group, arrange and conduct parent meetings, plan staff development activities, maintain all records and statistical data, coordinate the SAGP in each of the 24 elementary schools, and provide close follow-up for all Target Group students who are classified AG. As diagnosticians, they administer individual evaluations and communicate the results to parents and school personnel. In their consultative-supportive role, they hold interpretive conferences with parents and teachers; make referrals to psychologists, social workers, or counselors where needed; and

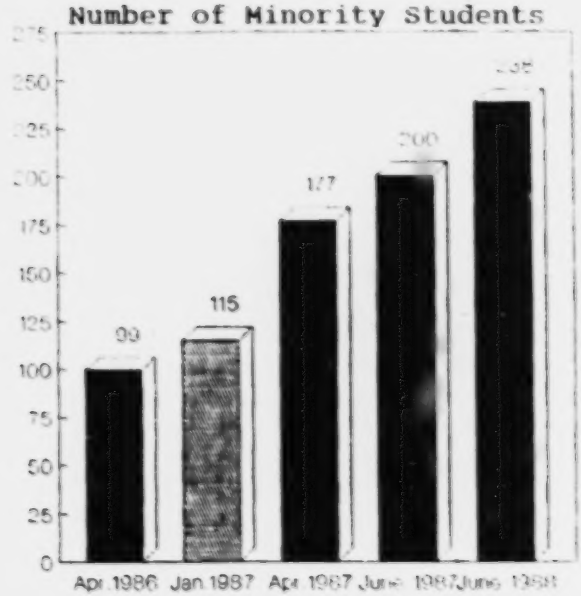
are available to consult with classroom teachers and teachers in the AG program, especially when students are found to have unusual test profiles of strengths and needs. The diagnosticians submit an annual report to the school administration and have presented the SAGP at conferences across the state and the country.

OUTCOMES

Number of SAGP students qualifying for AG classification: In the first two years of the SAGP, 459 Target Group students were evaluated and 168 qualified for AG classification. The number of minority students in the AG Program in Grades 2-5 rose from 99 in April 1986, before the project started, to 238 in June 1988, an increase of 140% (Figure 2). The percentage of students in the AG Program who are minorities increased from 13% to 25%. This figure is particularly significant in view of the large increase in non-minority student enrollment in the AG program during the same period of time.

Figure 2

Impact of SAGP on Number of Minority Students in AG Grades 2 - 5 April 1986 - June 1988



Importance of completing entire evaluation sequence: It is important to note that of the 168 students who qualified for AG classification, only 17% qualified on the first group screening, while 39% qualified on the second group screening, and 44% qualified on individual evaluations (K-ABC and WISC-R). Therefore 83% of the gifted students were not identified on the initial screening. In the past, minority students have been referred for possible AG classification but many have not progressed beyond the first screening. The automatic completion of the full testing sequence is felt to be an essential factor in the success of the SAGP.

SUMMARY

During its first two years, the Special AG Project has been successful in increasing minority participation in the Greensboro Public Schools AG Program. The number of gifted minority students in the AG Program grades two through five--where the project operates--has risen from 99 to 238. The percentage of second through fifth grade AG students who are minorities has increased from 13% to 25%, while at the middle and high school levels, the percentages have slightly decreased. Plans are underway to expand the SAGP into the upper grades. The most important factors in the project's success are felt to be the systematic referral procedure, the automatic continuation of all Target Group students through the entire evaluation sequence, the knowledgeable participation of parents, and the fact that diagnostician/coordinators are assigned specifically to the Special AG Project.

The authors feel the Greensboro model may be useful to other school systems in their efforts to address the important issue of the underrepresentation of minority students in their gifted programs.

Virginia H. Achey and Sadie Bryant Woods are educational diagnosticians and the coordinators of the Special Academically Gifted Project in the Greensboro Public Schools.